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THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOR.

It is a difficult thing for two men occupying different positions and moving in separate spheres in life to view an object and pass the same opinion upon its merits; it is, therefore, no wonder that so many conflicting opinions exist regarding the present conditions of capital and labor. It is the opinion of a great many, honestly entertained no doubt, that the men and women who labor do so under protest, and that they only await an opportunity to seize the men who employ labor by the throat and despoil them of their possessions. On the other hand, the laborer often regards the man who employs him as an enemy, who barely allows him to exist that he may reap profit from his toil. Both of these opinions prevail to-day; they are but the results of the present system of settling disputes between capital and labor. Some men say that the interests of capital and labor are identical; but it is evident that the majority of those most interested do not think so, or else these opinions would not prevail. What is regarded as a war between capital and labor is but a lack of confidence in each other. Did each of these interests give a thought to the condition or welfare of the other, two-thirds of the grievances we hear of would never exist. So long as it pays one man to buy labor at a low figure, and the man who sells his labor wishes to get as high a price for it as possible, it will be a difficult task to convince them that their interests are identical; and, viewing the question from that stand-point they are not identical. Men having capital, the product of labor, to invest, form themselves into companies or associations, and consolidate their capital that they may reap a greater profit from their investments. They believe that in union there is strength, and that by combination they can best protect their interests. The men who labor, taking this action of the men of capital as a criterion to go by, have formed themselves into companies or associations that they

may reap a greater profit from the investment of their capital, which is labor. The capital of the former is the creation of man; that of the latter is the creation of God, and of the two it is entitled to the most consideration, since no capital could exist unless labor created it. But labor is regarded as a secondary consideration; and that it may have a full, just share of the values or capital it has created, working-men have banded together in different associations and under different names, such as the "Machinists' and Blacksmiths' Union," the carpenters', molders', masons', bricklayers', tailors', hatters', and shoemakers' unions, each craft having its own organization. The history of the trade union reaches too far back, and would take too much time and space to discuss here. "The policy of the trade union, and strikes," is what I am asked to explain. The policy of the trade union is to protect its members against the encroachments of unjust employers. Individually, workingmen are weak, and, when separated, each one follows a different course, without accomplishing any thing for himself or his fellow-man; but when combined in one common bond of brotherhood, they become as the cable, each strand of which, though weak and insignificant enough in itself, is assisted and strengthened by being joined with others, and the work that one could not perform alone is easily accomplished by a combination of strands. Each of these unions sought to regulate affairs pertaining to its particular branch of trade, but the principal object of the trade union was to regulate the number of apprentices, the rate of wages, the number of working hours, and to assist each other in sickness or misfortune.

Some of these unions have been successful in the attempt to regulate the number of apprentices, but the greater portion of them have failed. The rapid introduction of labor-saving machinery has made it possible for one man or a boy to perform more labor in some trades in a day, than one hundred men could in the same length of time a century ago. The mechanic who has served from three to seven years of an apprenticeship finds, in a great many instances, that as soon as he becomes a journeyman his services are no longer required. He can only at rare intervals obtain employment where he can make any use of the particular part of the trade he has learned. Years ago, the man who learned the machinist trade was required to run the lathe and drill press, to work at the vise and "upon the floor" as well. To-day this trade has many subdivisions: one man runs

the lathe, another a drill press, while the planing and slotting machines can accomplish more in a day, in the way of smoothing off the rough surfaces of the metals, than the machinist with his hammer, chisel and file can in a week, or a month. What has been said of the machinist trade is true of a great many other trades. It is, therefore, of little avail to attempt to regulate the number of apprentices, when the mechanic who has served years at his business often finds himself of less consequence than a patent machine.

The principal business of the trade union, of late years, has been to relieve the distress of sick or disabled members, and to try and secure a fair day's wages for a fair day's work. In the multifarious branches of trade, capital has its combinations, and whether intended or not, they crush the manly hopes of labor, and attempt to trample poor humanity in the dust. To prevent this, the trade union has resorted to the strike. The only fault I have to find with the trade union of the past is that it rarely sought for any other remedy. Arbitration was seldom resorted to, and if the idea of coöperating with, or assisting any other union, was hinted at, the leader of the trade union issued the edict "Form no entangling alliances with those of other trades." I heard that order issued by the executive officer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers years ago. Soon after, a strike was inaugurated by that society, and the executive officer of the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' Union gave the command, "Man the foot-boards." The members of the last-mentioned union took the places of the men of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. It was not poverty or want that compelled them to do so, but revenge for a similar act practiced on them some time before by the other organization. I have seen men engaged in iron and steel works, whose duty it was to prepare the steel and iron for market; skilled in the art of heating the metals, they performed but little manual labor themselves. The heavy work was done by laborers; while the skilled workmen slept, these men were attending to their work for them; and though the skilled mechanics cleared from five to ten dollars a day, they grudgingly paid the laborer a dollar and twenty-five, or a dollar and fifty cents a day. The skilled workmen had a union, through the instrumentality of which they regulated the price of their labor; the unskilled workmen had no organization, and were forced to content themselves with what the others chose to give them.

But while the unskilled laborer toiled, he learned the art of managing the metals himself; and soon became as proficient in the business as his employer. He then offered to do the work for less money; a reduction of wages followed; a strike ensued; and that union disbanded. The trade unionist seldom looked beyond the limits of his own society for the cause of any thing, no matter what the effect might be. The Knights of St. Crispin, at one time a very powerful trade society, would scoff at the idea of amalgamating with, or coming to an understanding with the Coal Miners' Union. But when the work in the mine slackened off, or was cut down to half time, the Crispin was not required to manufacture so many pairs of boots and shoes, and he felt the effect of half time in the coal mine without knowing the cause—for the coal miners wear out a great many pairs of boots and shoes in the year.

The machinists and blacksmiths employed in the construction of locomotives paid but little attention to the laws of supply and demand, and, so long as they had steady employment, made no inquiries concerning the state of trade in other localities; but when an overproduction of coal glutted the market, and the owners of the mines struck against a reduction in the price of coal, by putting the mines under their control on half time, it did not require so many locomotives to draw the coal to market. The result was a suspension of a portion of the force employed in the construction of locomotives (this includes machinists, molders, pattern-makers, blacksmiths and carpenters). It soon became apparent to the trade unionist that the strike could not remedy this evil, and he began to look for a better means of securing steady employment at living wages.

While the leader of the trade union inveighed against the forming of "entangling alliances with those of other trades," his employer had formed alliances with other employers of labor, and when a strike took place, he knew where to look for men to take the places of the strikers. While the trade unionist was devising the best means of supporting his brethren on strike, his employer was interesting himself in having laws passed by the State legislatures which made it a penal offense to engage in a strike under certain conditions. The narrow-minded policy that forbade entangling alliances with those of other trades also discouraged any attempt on the part of working-men to interfere with politics. The leader of the trade union, honest enough

in his convictions, no doubt, looked upon politics as a trade which rascals alone should learn. The result was that not a few rascals found their way into our State and national legislatures, and we find the statute books of the various States dotted here and there with laws framed wholly in the interest of capital—some of them for the prevention of strikes—while not a thought ever entered the heads of the able law-making statesmen about the causes which led to the strike. If the State has the right to enact laws for the protection of the capital of the rich man, it certainly has a right to make laws to protect the source of all capital—labor. In their haste and anxiety to please the capitalist our law-makers sometimes injure him as much as they do labor. In illustration of this I need cite but one act passed by the Pennsylvania Legislature. It became a law in 1877, and is entitled “An Act for the better protection of passengers upon railroads and to insure the prompt transportation and delivery of freights.” Section one of that act reads:

“Be it enacted, etc., That if any locomotive engineer, or other railroad employé upon any railroad within this State, engaged in any strike or with a view to incite others to such strike, or in furtherance of any combination or preconcerted arrangement with any other person to bring about a strike, shall abandon the locomotive engine in his charge, when attached either to a passenger or freight train, at any place other than the destination of such train, or shall refuse or neglect to continue to discharge his duty, or to proceed with said train to the place of destination, as aforesaid, he shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not less than one hundred nor more than five hundred dollars, and may be imprisoned for a term not exceeding six months at the discretion of the court.”

The other sections of the act follow in the same strain. If the members of the Pennsylvania Legislature were actuated by a sincere desire to afford better protection to the traveling public, they would not have framed so one-sided an act. As it reads, only the employés are required to look after the welfare of the passengers. The railroad companies may stop their trains at any time or for so long as they like, so far as that act is concerned. If the intention was to deal justly by capital and labor, they would have passed a law requiring of railroad companies to give, say five days' notice to their employés of any intent on their part to reduce wages, or of any change in the management of the road likely to bring on a strike, and also requiring employés

to give five days' notice of their unwillingness to continue to work after receiving such notice, and then fix a penalty for a refusal of either party to comply. Had that been done, it would have afforded ample protection to passengers, and would have secured the prompt transportation of freights. Then working-men would not have looked upon the law as the creation of corporate capital—which it really is. The principal effect of that law was to deprive the traveling public of the use of one hundred and twenty-eight locomotives, which were destroyed by the torch of the incendiary in the round-houses at Pittsburgh during the great strike of 1877, and to fasten an extra burden upon the industries of that city, in the shape of increased taxation, to pay for damages done to property during the troubles of that year.

A strike cannot change the apprentice system, a strike cannot remove unjust technicalities and delays in the administration of justice, a strike cannot regulate the laws of supply and demand; for if it cuts off the supply, it also cuts off the demand, by throwing consumers out of employment, thereby curtailing their purchasing powers. A strike cannot remove or repeal unjust laws, for at best the strike secures but a temporary relief; it may result in an advance of wages, but if so it is a dearly bought victory, and at the first available opportunity, another reduction is imposed. The strike is the weapon of force, and "who overcomes by force hath overcome but half his foe." If the men who willingly lose one, two, three or six months' time in a strike, would continue to work, and set apart the money thus spent for the purpose of creating a coöperative fund, and if the men who contribute to their support would set apart the money they advance for the purpose of adding it to that fund, they would soon amass a sum sufficient to erect factories or shops large enough to give employment to their idle brethren. But I fail to see any lasting good in a strike.

The cause of so many disputes between capital and labor lies in the present wage system. Take away the labor, and capital could not exist. If you remove capital, or any portion of it, labor can create more; it is, therefore, not so dependent on capital as capital is upon labor. No sane man would think of investing his capital in an enterprise, if he did not have the assurance that he could employ labor to carry on his business. Since they must operate together, they must assume the proportions of a partnership, in which one invests his money, the other his brain

and muscle. If working-men were admitted to the councils of the employers, and were accorded a percentage of the profits on their investment, and if more confidence existed between the two, then strikes would be of rare occurrence. The worker is as much interested in the success of his employer as he is himself. If, instead of endeavoring to reduce wages to the lowest possible figure, the employer would content himself with a reasonable share of the profits of his business, and would call his employ  s in and say: "We will operate the business of this concern together; all that we realize above a certain sum will be regarded as profit; I am entitled to a certain percentage of it, you are entitled to the remainder; when the market is falling our profits will not be so large; and you will at all times know how my business stands. It is to your interest to see that I prosper, and I will always accord to you the fullest confidence." If employers would look upon their employ  s as equals in the scale of moral worth, and treat them accordingly, there would be fewer grievances to record.

Men who found the trade union too narrow and contracted to suit their views find all they have sought for in the Knights of Labor, an organization founded in 1869, but which was kept profoundly secret until the beginning of the present year. One reason for keeping it so closely guarded was to shield its members from being discharged, as they were so often in the old trade union.

The seed, if not properly protected, is easily blown away or destroyed by the elements, but if sufficient care is taken to cover it in planting, it takes root and grows. The rain, wind, and sunshine, elements that would have destroyed it if it were left exposed, now contribute to give it life and strength. So it was with the Knights of Labor. Had that body been organized openly, public opinion and the opposition it would meet with from other labor societies, would have prevented its growth. But it was properly covered, it took root and grew all over the United States, and to-day it assists in molding public opinion itself, for it controls several of our leading journals and need no longer fear opposition. It teaches its members to think for themselves, and that a full understanding may be arrived at between employer and employ  . The workman and the manufacturer may meet in the assembly and exchange ideas. Business men meet with working-men within its folds, where they discuss

their mutual relations. The organization has adopted the motto: "That is the most perfect government in which an injury to one is the concern of all." Members of isolated trade unions are becoming members of the Knights of Labor; men of all creeds, all nationalities, all occupations (except lawyers, bankers, stock gamblers, and idlers), are admitted. The idea is to "bring within the folds of the organization every department of productive industry, making knowledge a stand-point for action, and industrial and moral worth, not wealth, the true standard of individual and national greatness."

This association desires "the abrogation of all laws that do not bear *equally* upon capital and labor; the substitution of arbitration for strikes; the prohibition of child labor; to secure for both sexes equal pay for equal work; the reduction of the hours of labor to eight per day, so that the laborers may have more time for social enjoyment and intellectual improvement, and be enabled to reap the advantages conferred by the labor-saving machinery which their brains have created; to prevail upon governments to establish a purely national circulating medium, issued directly to the people, without the intervention of any system of banking corporations, which money shall be a legal tender in payment of all debts, public or private; the establishment of coöperative institutions, productive and distributive; the reserving of the public lands—the heritage of the people—for the actual settler. NOT ANOTHER ACRE FOR RAILROADS OR CORPORATIONS."

Other reforms are sought for by this organization, but these are among the principal ones. It will be observed that political action must be resorted to before we can carry out these schemes. This may lead to the supposition that the Knights of Labor is a political organization. In so far as it teaches its members that the evils they complain of are brought about by bad legislation, and that the remedy must come through wise, judicious legislation, it is political, but not partisan. Legislation, good or bad, affects the man who (with pick, shovel and crowbar) lays the rails, as well as the man who guides the engine over them, or the man who perfects the drawings for the engine. That they may take united action when necessary, is the reason for bringing them within the fold of one organization. I can hardly enumerate the principal advantages and benefits to be derived from such an association; politicians assert that there exists no necessity for an

organization where political questions are discussed. Until very lately, working-men entertained the same opinion, but necessity has taught them that, in order to compel politicians to perform their duty faithfully, the people must be educated up to a standard high enough to enable them to judge for themselves whether a law be passed in the interests of a class or for the public good. Labor, all its rights—capital, all its rights—no special laws or privileges for either, but “equal and exact justice for all.”

T. V. POWDERLY.